

**Personal History.** To merit a first-rate biography, a subject's personality must possess intriguing qualities. One can hardly think of two people as dissimilar as Joseph Stalin of twentieth-century Russia and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu of eighteenth-century Britain, yet both excite the reader's curiosity. Is Stalin—the most powerful man in the world today—a bewildered, fumbling, temporizing provincial or a shrewd and far-seeing revolutionary? Was Lady Mary—the inspirer and confidante of Congreve and Fielding, the foe of Pope and Walpole—a lovely or disagreeable creature, a cruel or understanding woman? In *"Stalin: A Political Biography"* Isaac Deutscher offers some answers to the first question, while Lewis Gibbs copes with the baffling gentlewoman in *"The Admirable Lady Mary"* (reviewed today).

## Master of the Masses

**STALIN: A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY.** By Isaac Deutscher. New York: Oxford University Press. 600 pp. \$5.

By MARTIN EBON

**P**RESIDENT TRUMAN once called Joseph Stalin "a prisoner of the Politburo." In his political biography of Stalin, Isaac Deutscher shows that the Soviet premier is indeed a prisoner—a prisoner of his own career, his own eminence, and his own illusions.

Stalin has been the master of Russia and of world Communism for nearly a quarter of a century. And yet, during all this time he has lived in isolation. He is the head of a vast political-economic machine, and at the same time he is its slave. Deutscher's biography turns a spotlight on the many forgotten incidents that have shown Stalin bewildered by the unexpected, fumbling, temporizing, about-facing.

The first half of the book deals with Stalin's early and middle life. That is ground which has been covered by others; this compilation shows discretion and care as it leads up to the period when Stalin became the most powerful man in the world. The boy, the adolescent revolutionary, the patient Bolshevik Party secretary made room for the master of masses. Writing of Russia's rapid industrialization, Deutscher says:

Imagine that that nation numbered 160 million people; and that it was lured, prodded, whipped, and shepherded into that surrealistic enterprise by an ordinary, prosaic, fairly sober man, whose mind had suddenly become possessed by a half-real and half-somnambulist vision, a man who established himself in the role of super-judge and super-architect, in the role of a modern super-Pharaoh.

Mr. Deutscher, a staff member of *The Economist*, of London, finds again that Stalin set forces into motion which gathered runaway momentum. Things were forever going too far. He had to blame the "distortionists" for the "excesses" of farm collectivization. He had to go back on his own definition that Fascism and democratic Socialism were "not antipodes but twins." He made a pact with Nazi Germany because he did not expect Poland and France to fall so quickly. He tried to placate Hitler by closing the Belgian, Norwegian, and Yugoslav embassies in Moscow, because their

governments had ceased to exist. Deutscher says that this act, and the allegation by which he supported it, pose the question of what was more astounding, "his lack of scruple or his shortsightedness."

Sir Stafford Cripps, then British Ambassador in Moscow, told Stalin about the forthcoming German attack on the Soviet Union. As late as one week before the Nazi invasion, the Soviet news agency violently attacked Sir Stafford for spreading rumors of an "impending Russo-German war." The biographer says it would be difficult to find "anything quite as pathetic as this statement, where Stalin praised before the whole world those who next week were to unmask themselves as Russia's mortal enemies and taunted those who next week would be her only allies."

The self-imprisoned Stalin was the only leading statesman who never once visited the front, but remained "voluntarily immured in the Kremlin throughout the war." Until the last moment, this biography indicates, Stalin suspected the Western powers of toying with the notion of a separate peace with Germany. In this he misjudged the powerful force of public opinion in the Western democracies, which would never have permitted its heads of state to make any such deal with Nazism. His suspicions would not die, and at Teheran he looked upon Churchill and Roosevelt



**THE AUTHOR:** Forty-two-year-old Isaac Deutscher, a British subject now, has had an ear to the Party line since its beginning, when as a youth in Cracow he turned aside from the Talmudic scrolls of a Polish rabbinical family to fondle, briefly, the Red hammer and sickle. There being no room for disagreement with Moscow, and Mr. Deutscher being traditionally one to question why, in 1932—then literary critic, economist, and political publicist in Warsaw—he was expelled from the camaraderie.

Equipped with thirteen years' on-the-ground knowledge of Russia and the Ukraine, he went to London in 1939 as correspondent for some Polish newspapers. That year he began to write about European economics and politics for *The Economist*, on whose editorial staff he has been since 1942 as chief Continental correspondent, military reporter, and authority on the USSR. For four years (1942-46) *The Observer* gave him berth as special writer on diplomatic affairs and roving correspondent. He also provided it with personality studies of prominent Europeans and, under the nom de plume "Peregrine," contributed a popular weekly feature, "European Notebook." Among the various additional publications which have sought his articles are *The Times* of London and, frequently of late, *The New York Times Magazine*. BBC has called on him to air for its "Third Programme" his interpretations of what's current with the Communists; the Royal Institute of International Affairs has given him podiums, and the new edition of the "Cambridge Modern History" will include chapters by him on contemporary Russian history. "Stalin" is the first book of the trilogy "Social History of Russia," on which he is engaged. The next two will be on Lenin and Trotsky in exile. —R. G.

merely "as representatives of the capitalist class."

Mr. Deutscher interprets Stalin's actions during the final war period as the results of indecision. They were lost in the shuffle of approaching peace, and it is worth recalling some of them: the conservative policies of the French and Italian Communist parties; a half-hearted and amateurish attempt to establish contact with the Vatican; insistence on Russia's annexation of Eastern Poland, although the Warsaw Government was to be a Moscow-controlled regime; dismantling of East German industry, although it was to serve as an arsenal for the Soviet Union, under Communist control; the Free Germany Committee in Moscow, which might have become a ready-made German government under Stalin's guidance.

In Stalin's personality forces of tradition and revolution have been at odds. In his German policy the biographer finds that "the nationalist, one might say the anti-revolutionary, element predominated longest." Deutscher says that Stalin's foreign policy resulted not from preconceived plans but from contradictory domestic and foreign pressures—and "control of events over him was much stronger than his control over events."

The author does not ask or answer the question of the decade: What prompted Stalin to abandon the tactical advantages of the soothing and conciliatory "Teheran period," and to embark instead on a furious anti-Western and anti-American crusade? This biography does suggest that Stalin once more erred in his estimate of Western mood and reaction; once more he did not anticipate that a policy of renewed antagonism would alienate the allies of yesterday.

Mr. Deutscher's book, a product of painstaking and astute journalism, brings Stalin up to date. Much of the material is based on recently published "inside" stories by prominent statesmen. It is excellent in compilation and presentation, but weak on personality analysis. In the end, the author finds Stalin superior to Hitler; but then, Hitler was a madman, and Stalin isn't. Deutscher weighs the positive and negative facets of the Stalin regime with care, although his spirited criticism of the Soviet system is far from the bloodless, on-the-one-hand-and-on-the-other-hand school of writing.

The picture of a man self-isolated and ignorant of the world on our side of the Iron Curtain which emerges from this political biography of Joseph Stalin is disquieting. What will he do next, this lonely, old, fear-ridden man in the Kremlin?

## Sappho in Hoopskirts

THE ADMIRABLE LADY MARY. By Lewis Gibbs. New York: William Morrow & Co. 255 pp. \$4.

By ROBERT HALSBAND

LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU is a particularly fascinating subject for a biography. In her long eventful life, from 1689 to 1762, she lived through more than a lifetime of quarrels, happiness, scandal, pain, and fortitude. Her earlier years saw her romantic elopement with Edward Wortley and her perilous journey with him to Constantinople when he was appointed Ambassador. She also became a friend of Alexander Pope, who started by passionately adoring her and ended by passionately hating her and libeling her as an infamous lewd Sappho. At the age of fifty she enigmatically left England for a retirement on the Continent which ended when she returned to die in England twenty-two years later. Even from beyond the grave her strong will prevailed, for the next year her Embassy Letters, which she had given to a clergyman in Rotterdam, were published against the wishes of her family. What sort of personality formed—and was formed by—such a life? Pope and Walpole have sketched her portrait in acid, but Joseph Spence, the sober professor of poetry at Oxford, met her in Italy and reported differently:

She is one of the most shining characters in the world, but shines like a comet; she is all irregularity, and always wandering; the most wise, most imprudent; loveliest, most disagreeable; best-natured, cruellest woman in the world, "all things by turns and nothing long."

Aside from her fascination as a personality, Lady Mary is important for her activities in the literary scene of the eighteenth century. She scribbled facile witty couplets and composed vigorous thumping essays; she bestowed her friendship or her patronage on writers as important as Congreve and Fielding; and she wrote letters of all sorts which have given her preeminence in that genre. Here again her versatility is astonishing: the priggish courtship letters, the elaborate virtuoso Embassy Letters, the sparkling social series from Twickenham, and finally the long series of leisurely philosophical letters from her retirement. "I am dragging my ragged remnant of life to England," was one of the last sentences she wrote, and it shows the tough fiber of her mind. She is sometimes called the English Mme. de Sévigné, but she



Lady Mary—"quarrels, happiness, scandal, pain, and fortitude."

has not much of the Frenchwoman's soft tenderness. Voltaire preferred her letters to those of his countrywoman; they were not for her nation alone, he wrote, but for all nations.

The elegance and erudition which Voltaire found in her letters came from a highly cultivated mind, for while she shared some of the prejudices of her social class, she also shared the new scientific and cultural interests of the wider world. From Turkey she brought back and popularized the practice of inoculation for smallpox. She talked and wrote about marriage and the position of women; she was, in fact, a pioneer feminist. The learning she acquired with steady application she carefully disguised, for as a *bel esprit* she despised pedantry whether in a man or in a bluestocking. Her intellect was so keenly developed, so free from cant and affectation, that it is hard to think of her as a woman in hoopskirts at the courts of the first two Georges.

A woman with such a life, personality, and mind is no easy subject. Mr. Gibbs admits that he has no new materials; his aim seems to be to emphasize her admirable qualities and to enliven her rather dull husband. But his evidence, as contained in the last edition of Lady Mary's works (1861), has been squeezed so dry by previous biographers that he is forced into elaborate conjectures for his analyses. One example may be given:

However it may have been (and hardly any evidence about it exists) there can be no doubt that Mr. Wortley exercised a strong in-